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Assam tourism: SWOT analysis & marketing strategy

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Abstract

Tourism is one of the central pillars of the Indian economy. It generates revenue and income through various means. This study explores the current state of tourism in Assam. Assam is one of the states of north-east India which also acts as a gateway to the whole land of north-east. This lush green Indian state is rich not only in natural resources and beautiful landscapes but also in diversity, culture and heritage. The current study conducts a SWOT analysis of the tourism sector of Assam. Although Assam has a lot to offer to the tourists, the lack of sufficient awareness, education and publicity amongst local residents regarding the economic, social and cultural benefits of tourism and the lack of coordination among tourism administrators, owners of the hotel industry, travel and government entities turn out to be the weakness of the state. The study also provides some suggestions for developing marketing strategies to promote Assam tourism.

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1. Introduction

Tourism has emerged as one of the largest industries in the World today generating employment and vast revenue. Several countries have transformed themselves through tourism and created a global presence in the tourism industry. A developed tourism can generate employment, increase revenue or foreign exchange earning to a state or a country.

Lying as a heart of North-East India, Assam is rightly endowed with nature and has the appreciable possibilities for developing into a compelling force if tourism is encouraged as a thriving industry. The state of Assam has steadily developed into a major tourism destination thanks to its abundance of economic resources and rich cultural and ethnic history. Assamese tourism has great potential to generate substantial revenue and provide jobs for the local population, but due to various obstacles, such as poor infrastructure, communication breakdowns, remote location, cultural contexts that breed political unpredictability, the rise in rebel activity, a lack of funding from the central government, flawed socioeconomic and political structures, a lack of suitable travel and tourism development policies from state governments, a lack of conducive investment environments, and a lack of conditions, the industry is unable to reach its full potential.

The objectives of the paper is to conduct a SWOT analysis of the tourism sector of Assam and to develop some strategies and measures for further improvement of the tourism sector.

2. Review of Literature

An organization can use the SWOT analysis as a business analysis technique for each of its markets, products, and services to determine how best to grow in the future. The procedure entails determining the organization's advantages and disadvantages as well as the opportunities and risks that exist in the market it serves. The acronym SWOT is formed by the initial letter of each of these four components.

	HELPFUL	HARMFULL
INTERNAL ENVIROMENT	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESS
EXTERNAL ENVIROMENT	OPPURTUNITIES	THREATS

Fig 1: SWOT Analysis

3. Methodology

To conduct a SWOT analysis of Assam tourism this paper will make an analytical and in-depth study of the secondary data which were collected from published and unpublished documents of the Department of Forest and Directorate of Tourism, Government of Assam, Various Journals, Books, Newspapers etc.

SWOT Analysis for Tourism Sector of the state of Assam Strength

Assam, the most colourful region of northeastern India, is a verdant paradise that blends a wide range of interests and natural wonders that pique the interest and inspire curiosity. With its top-notch tourism resources, Assam has a remarkable and heavenly diversity to offer visitors.

- A green paradise, Assam offers picturesque landscape, beautiful mountain and seven rivers.
- Natural lagoons and fine picnic spots.
- Flora and fauna of world famous wild life sanctuaries like Kaziranga National Park, Manas National Park, Orange National Park and other give a lasting impression.
- Pilgrimage destinations such as Kamakhya, Hajo, Vasisthashram, Nabagraha Temple and other are there. The historical city with important archaeological remains and monuments such as Sivsagar, speak of a glorious past of high architectural achievements.
- Assam's rich heritage of artistic craftsmanship includes the basketwork and mats of Kamrup, Sibsagar and Nagaon are well known and Cachar district is known for its very special sital patimat.
- The perfect fusion of heritage of its tribes, have made Assam the home of most colourful festivals. This state celebrates spring festivals, autumn festivals, food festivals, music festivals and the Jorhat pony race a legacy of the Raj.
- The mighty Brahmaputra river, rock hills in Morigaon District, trekking routes of North Cachar hills, welcome adventure tourists to conquer them and enjoy these all with high spirit.
- Assam, known for its tea, is home to two of the oldest plantations, Sensua and Gatoonga, which are in a world within a world and 15 minutes away from the closest airport in Jorhat. The hundreds of acres that make up the tea states provide visitors the opportunity to wander around and take in the dappled sunshine that filters through the shade trees and creates patterns of black and white on the carefully trimmed tea bushes.

Weakness

In the present scenario of Tourism in the State the following weakness have been identified:

- Lack of comprehensive policy framework of the State govt. for long term development of tourism, despite it having a lot potential of tourism development.
- The lack of awareness in overseas countries of the State's natural and cultural features of outstanding attractions.
- Lack of sufficient awareness, education and publicity amongst local residents regarding economic, social and cultural benefits of tourism.
- Lack of co-ordination among tourism administrators, owners of the hotel industry, travel and tourism association, other constitutes of Govt. like Town and Country Planning Department, Civil Aviation, PWD, Environment, Railway, etc.
- Deficiencies in infrastructures like poor road conditions or non-accessibility, poor solid waste management system.
- Lack of adequate professional training facilities for human resource development and quality of services
- Lack of adequate security cover.
- The lack of convenient direct international air services to Guwahati, Assam from the major tourist generating centers of Western Europe, Northeast Asia, North America and Australia/ New Zealand.
- The State's Department of Tourism and the Travel and Tourism Development Corporation are unable to effectively market and promote the State's tourism opportunities and attractions to international tour operators and potential travellers.

Opportunities

The most popular tourist destination in all of India is Assam, which is located in the northeast. The combination of several essential characteristics, which together provide comprehensive tourist products that provide specific market segments with gratifying and fulfilling experiences, determines a destination's appeal for tourism. Among these qualities are:

- Natural features (inland, topography, flora & fauna)
- Cultural features (heritage, monuments, events, are, music and dance)
- Built feature (tourist accommodation, tours and recreational facilities, urban and rival environment)
- Infrastructure and amenities (transportation, communication, shopping, comfort amenities)
- Effective service (trained in technical, linguistic and social skills)
- Good information (through tourist information system, printed materials, maps, signposts)
- A welcoming environment (local inhabitants aware of the value of, and have strong positive attitudes towards tourism and tourists)

Assam has all these characteristics and they give Assam great potential for future growth in the tourism sectors of business, health, education, adventure, and cultural tourism, as well as heritage and adventure travel. These tourism-related activities are the newest additions for both domestic and international travellers.

Given the information above, it is clear that the State has a great deal of potential for growing both its local tourism industry and drawing in a large number of foreign visitors.

Threats

Despite being a unique tourist destination, Assam has some challenges as well, which directly and indirectly curb the growth of tourism. These are as such:

- Assam virtually does not have any trained guides placed in important places of tourist attraction.
- Tourists daunted long distances to access to Assam and its districts due to poor transportation system, conditions of roads and poor tourist facilities
- Social problems like causes of insurgency and violent political movements should be curbed or resolved and provisions to give complete security cover for the tourists.
- Infrastructures, if not improved, especially roads, solid waste management, power and accommodation, it would create major hindrances in the development of tourism in Assam.

4. Developing a marketing strategy to promote tourism sector in Assam

For the state of Assam, tourism is one of the main economic foundations. In Assam, the majority of the tourism industry has grown haphazardly and without any planning. Tourism promotion and marketing activities have always taken a backseat due to a variety of factors, including a lack of funding from the Central Government, an inadequate socioeconomic and governmental structure, a lack of suitable travel and tourism development policies from State Governments, a lack of a suitable and friendly investment environment, and the absence of favourable conditions or an effective marketing strategy to draw tourists.

Following are some marketing strategies to promote tourism in Assam listed below:

Branding image

Even though Assam Tourism's brand is "Awesome Assam," it hasn't been able to draw in more visitors because of poor marketing tactics. Assam tourism needs a brand image along the lines of "Incredible India," "God's Own Country," and similar themes to highlight the state's distinctiveness and set it apart from other travel destinations.

Advertising

Newspapers, lifestyle publications, in-flight magazines, TV commercials, talk shows, road shows, travel marts, tourism booths and kiosks, etc. should all be used to promote the brand "Awesome Assam." The tourism department can use print advertising, such as creating brochures or booklets that include information about different tourist destinations, Assamese rural areas, culture and cuisine, and wellness tourism. These materials can then be distributed worldwide to hotels and restaurants, airports, train stations, and cultural events.

Trade show/Road show

Road shows and trade exhibits give the destination access to all of the travel and tourism vendors in the area and beyond. In order to advance Assam tourism and benefit the travel sector, trade exhibitions and road shows concerning the

state's tourist attractions ought to be planned around the nation and the globe. A trade expo or road show can also attract millions of tourists, the national travel agencies, and the media.

Sponsorships

There should be sponsors in mega events and giveaways that tie in with the Tourism destinations and create a level of prestige for the brand "Awesome Assam".

Mobile marketing

Online and mobile media have emerged as key promotional tools in the wake of COVID-19. To further promote Assam tourism, an interactive and functional mobile application that has all the information about the destination, hotels, and tourism should be released. Additionally, SMS (Short Message Service) is used to send appropriate text messages promoting tourism.

Promotion through Film Industry

Reputable Hindi and other regional language filmmakers ought to be encouraged to shoot films in Assam by the state's tourism department. Subsidies will be given as part of a unique incentive programme. The department of tourism ought to recommend to the filmmakers that their film incorporate the diverse cultures of Assam. To enhance the promotion of Assamese tourism attractions, the government of Assam ought to coordinate regional, national, and international film festivals.

Tourism Product Development

There should be more state circuits designated for thorough promotional development in addition to the state's national tourism circuits. The national circuits will be connected and merged with the state circuits, giving visitors the freedom to select the product of their choice and easily view the state's diversity. To encourage free movement of tourists between these regions, a state circuit encompassing the Barak Valley and North-Cachar Hills may be connected to the national circuit that links Shillong and Kaziranga. The primary target audience for these subsidiary circuits, especially the smaller circuits, will be domestic tourists.

Transit Tourism

Many visitors, especially those from outside the country, view Guwahati not just as a tourism destination but also as a stopover or entryway to the northeastern states. Travellers spend roughly two days travelling on average, which is a fantastic chance to advertise Guwahati City-based tourism under the banners "One day in Guwahati" or "Two days in Guwahati." In addition to daytime trips to tourist destinations, the government can work with the private sector to market Guwahati's nightlife, including its nightclubs, malls, pubs, bars, sports bars, and indoor gaming spaces.

Tourist centric approach:

Ensuring that visitors to Assam have a delightful experience is of paramount importance. A visitor's experience can be greatly improved by providing them with opportunities to sample local cuisine, get a sense of the local way of life, and purchase easily accessible handicrafts and souvenirs. It is important to encourage hoteliers and restaurateurs to provide regional cuisine in customary ways. This will improve the number of visitors to the state.

5. Conclusion

Today, the tourism business is one that is both leading and emerging globally, and some people even rank it as the top industry. Traveller demands have always changed as a result of demographic, sociostructural, and sociocultural trends, and service providers in the tourism industry must make significant adjustments. The latent vulnerability of tourism as a boom sector has been well illustrated by war and tourism, bad weather, the ongoing globalisation of tourism, and the ageing of society (which is becoming more and more visible in the public consciousness). The current report offers a thorough examination of the advantages, disadvantages, possibilities, and risks facing Assam's tourist industry. This provides a comprehensive picture of the current situation regarding performance and its many stages. Right now, a well-thought-out design and plan for every traveller is important. Therefore, a successful and efficient marketing plan would have a profoundly revolutionary effect on Assamese tourism.

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